

## **Fix push factors at home to stop doctors leaving Malaysia, says medical association**

BY CHURCHILL EDWARD ON SEPTEMBER 19, 2025, FRIDAY AT 7:02 AM [SARAWAK](#)



*Dr Thirunavukarasu stresses that “push factors at home are far stronger than the pull abroad,” and urged the federal government to address these issues decisively.*

**KUCHING (Sept 19):** Stalled careers, inadequate on-call allowances, toxic workplaces and unclear career pathways are driving Malaysian doctors abroad, said the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA).

Its president Datuk Dr Thirunavukarasu Rajoo stressed that “push factors at home are far stronger than the pull abroad,” and urged the federal government to address these issues decisively.

“While we cannot stop brain drain completely, we can minimise it by fixing these push factors to keep our doctors in the country,” he said in a statement yesterday.

Dr Thirunavukarasu said proposals to seek compensation from Singapore for hiring Malaysian-trained doctors miss the root cause of the problem.

“Our doctors are leaving not because others are taking them, but because we are pushing them away.”

He acknowledged the Ministry of Health’s positive steps under Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad, including absorbing contract doctors and abolishing the 10-year contract system.

“These announcements are encouraging, but what matters now is turning talk into actions.”

He stressed that the long-delayed increase in on-call (ETAP) allowances, approved in April 2025, must be implemented immediately and not deferred to 2026.

“Implementation must take place immediately to restore morale and rebuild trust among doctors holding the system together.”

On the issue of compensation, he said it should only apply to government-sponsored or bonded doctors with clear service obligations, not privately funded graduates.

“Any framework must be fair, transparent, and consistent with international norms on labour mobility.”

Dr Thirunavukarasu called for a whole-of-government approach involving the Health Ministry, Finance Ministry, and Public Service Department, instead of piecemeal fixes.

This, he said, should include immediate ETAP increases and periodic reviews; clear and time-bound career pathways for permanent posts and specialist training; safe workloads supported by proper manpower norms; and modern facilities with a supportive workplace culture.

He noted that enabling initiatives are already on the table, including manpower norms for all healthcare categories, a national manpower dashboard, and the ‘Suka Sama Suka’ posting platform.

“These are important building blocks and should be executed without delay. Malaysia cannot afford to keep losing doctors.

“The solution is not to seek compensation from others, but to create an environment where our doctors feel valued, supported, and given a future they can believe in.

“Turning talk into actions is the only way we can strengthen our profession and deliver real value to patients.”

His remarks followed a Sept 11 report by Code Blue quoting former minister Datuk Seri Abdul Rahman Dahlan, who demanded Singapore compensate Malaysia for recruiting Malaysian doctors and nurses.

Abdul Rahman, who was previously Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department in charge of the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) from 2016 to 2018, accused Singapore of being “the most aggressive” in poaching Malaysian healthcare professionals, citing unprecedented walk-in interviews held in Kuala Lumpur.

“Previously, out of deference to Malaysian sensitivities, they only organised quiet, targeted and selective interviews for pre-identified Malaysian candidates – and even then, only in Singapore.

“Now it’s open, aggressive, and ‘in-your-face’ marketing campaigns, just like what Singaporean developers do when seeking Malaysian buyers for their condominiums,” he wrote on Facebook.